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THE AMERICAN PRINTER

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VOLUME 48: NUMBER 2 NEW YORK: APRIL 1909 $2 A YEAR: FOREIGN $3

WEE BOOKS OF LONG AGO

By Wilbur Macey Stone

NOW-A-DAYS it seems that the publishers believe that the smaller the child the larger the book he should have, as they put forth many children's books that are too large for even a grown-up to handle with comfort. They surely did things better when grandmother's grandmother was young. Then the books for children were of proper smallness for the hands that were to hold them and were measured in inches where now, many times, we must measure in feet.

The books which dear old John Newbery issued from St. Paul's Church-yard for the wee Britishers of the eighteenth centurywere almost exclusively of a size that a small boy could conveniently tuck into his jacket pocket or that his little sister could put into her reticule. Four of Newbery's little books laid side by side on an ordinary magazine page would still leave a generous margin all around. Therefore the children immediately fell in love with these neat little volumes, not only because of their entertaining stories and pretty pictures, but because of their most attractive smallness. Newbery's popularity and business grew rapidly and there soon sprang up around St. Paul's Church-yard in old London a host of rivals anxious to share his vogue with the young folks. And it was not only Newbery's neighbors about the Church-yard that were his rivals, for copies of his novel productions soon found their way across the ocean to the colonies in America and here alas, even at that early date found the American piratical publisher awaiting them. Some of Newbery's books fell into the hands of Isaiah Thomas, of Worcester, in the colony of Massachusetts Bay, who promptly had the pictures duplicated and the type set, and perfect and complete copies soon appeared in all the glory of their "flowery and gilt" Dutch paper covers, just like the Newbery originals.

It was not, however, until about the close of the eighteenth century, and some time after the American colonies had cast off the yoke of the mother country and were bravely "paddling their own canoe," that the really wee books for children began to appear. Then Harvey and Darton, of London, in connection with J. Harris, the successor to the business of John Newbery, issued a series of little books very prettily made and embracing a variety of subjects. Those illustrated here are fat little volumes two and one-half inches square and about three quarters of an inch thick. They are neatly bound in bright red leather and stamped in gold. Two of the volumes are on English history, one is a short history of the Bible, and the fourth a book of biography. Each contains nearly fifty copper-plate engravings designed by Alfred Mills and are really excellent little volumes. These were all printed in 1824, but a picture in one of them bears an engraver's date of October 25, 1812, so it appears that in 1824 they had been popular for at least a dozen years, and there must have been a great many copies printed.

The English history commences with the ancient Britons and the invasion of Cæsar. Some of the illustrations are very curious. (1) The "Battle of Shrewsbury" shows all of one army bearing cross-bows and all of the other armed with lances, and the armies so close together that the cross-bows and lances overlap. Overhead, the air is full of flying arrows apparently coming out of the sky from both sides of the picture. In volume two, there is a picture of the "Taking of Guy Fawkes," and that gentleman surely looks badly scared. We also meet another old friend in the picture of "King Charles II. in the Oak" (2), familiar to our great-great-grandparents' childhood in the rhymed alphabet of the New England primer, where is shown "The Royal Oak;" it was the tree that saved his royal majesty. Altho this history is brought down to 1807, it is surprisingly lacking in any reference to the Revolutionary War. It illustrates and describes the death of General Wolfe at Quebec, but there is no record of our George and his little hatchet, nor of any of his later and greater deeds.

In the little Bible history we have all the well-known Bible stories told and illustrated. The death of Absolom is vividly portrayed. He must certainly have been not only a beautiful young man but a fashionable dandy as well, for he wears the costume of a Roman warrior, just a few hundred years before that style was in vogue (3). The volume of biography is nearly as reticent about America as are the volumes of English history. The only American mentioned in this book is Benjamin Franklin.

But alas for the ingenious English originators of these pretty little books, the American publishers promptly appropriated them and down in Benjamin Franklin's own town, one Jacob Johnson, whose presses were for many years busy on products to please the children, reprinted most of Alfred Mills' books and sold them broadcast over the land.

There was a Roman History, a Natural History and a wee Bible issued by Johnson, all copies of English orig-

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inals. Also a little book entitled "People of all Nations, an Useful Toy for Girl or Boy." In this book the nations are arranged alphabetically.

Under "H" it is stated that "A Highlander of Scotland is a very hardy man; he is fond of the music of the bagpipes and takes snuff in great plenty. They are very civil to strangers." The author seemed to have been at a loss for a nation to describe under "O." He was not, however, discouraged by so small a matter, but nonchalantly pictures and describes an orang-outang calling him "a wild man of the woods." The Englishman is illustrated as of generous proportions and bearing a steaming dish. The story is, "An Englishman is accused by foreigners with eating too much. The man before us looks as if he was a cook with roast beef and we wish that everybody may live well." The picture of a "Florida Indian" (4) would do duty equally well as a representation of Cupid, the little god of love.

A row of the interesting wee books

Battle of Shrewsbury.

Figure 1

The illustrations in "A Book of Nouns or Things which may be Seen," also published by Johnson in 1802, were apparently not made by Alfred Mills, but by some inferior local artist. They are crude and ill-proportioned, and the artist was surely an advocate of simplified spelling as his title, the "Black Tood Gull" will serve to illustrate.

Another and even smaller book entitled "A Description of Various Objects; Vol. 2, 1803," was evidently intended to accompany a book of pictures. The page is only one and one-half by two inches in size, and each "description" occupies less than a page. The first "description" is "The Puppet Show," and is as follows: "Here are several little boys and girls looking at a puppet show. I suppose you would like to make one among them." Under "A Stage Waggon" it is stated, "a stage waggon travels at regular times from one town to another with goods. This waggon is going from London to York." It would thus appear that this little book had also been copied from an English original. I have seen several copies of this wee book, but have never been able to discover a copy of Vol. I., containing the pictures of the objects described.

Shortly before 1850 there was published, also in Philadelphia, a variety of little books a trifle larger than Alfred Mills' books and illustrated on alternate leaves with neatly made wood cuts. One of these books was "The Little Pilgrim's Progress" (5). The frontispiece is of "The Celestial City" (6) and the other illustrations show Christian in the various adventures of his journey thither. His battle with Apollyon, a fearful demon; his entrance to Vanity Fair, which looks much like Coney Island; his encounter with giant Despair; his capture in a net by Flatterer, and finally his passage of the river of Death and entrance to the Celestial City; all these and many more of his experiences are vividly pictured, each within about one square inch. A companion volume, entitled "Scenes in Europe," is illustrated with equal profusion and bears evidences of an English origin, as more than half the illustrations are of English scenes.

King Charles II. in the Oak

Figure 2

A hundred years ago Pearl Street, in New York, was the home of several printers who issued great quantities of small books for children. Among these printers was Samuel Wood, whose family has continued the publishing business in New York in unbroken succession to the present time. Wood made many little sixteen-page books in "flowery and gilt" wrappers that were delightful and sold for a penny each. The last page of Wood's "Picture Alphabet" bears the following ingenuous remarks:

Notice is hereby given to the little boys and girls, both of the city and country, that at the same place where this picture alphabet was bought, may be had a great variety of books, carefully adapted, so as not to waste their precious time; but that the little readers, while they are agreeably amused, may be profitably instructed.

Another Pearl Street publisher of children's books was Mahlon Day, proprietor of the "New Juvenile Bookstore." One of Day's little books was directed against the frivolity of Mother Goose and nursery rhymes in general. But his efforts seem to have had no

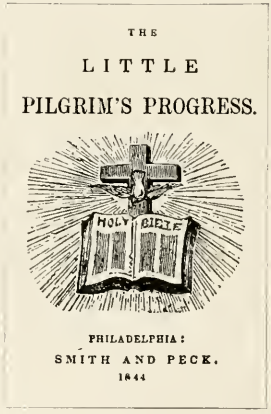

Figure 5

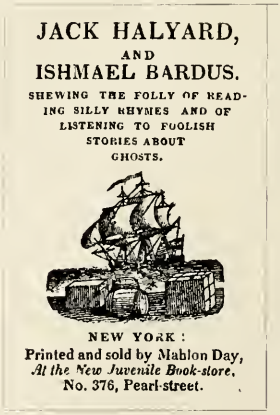

Figure 7

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lasting result, as we still have dear old Mother Goose with us, while Day and his counterblast are gone and forgotten. This little book was entitled "Jack Halyard and Ishmael Bardus, (7) shewing the folly of reading silly rhymes, and of listening to the foolish stories about ghosts." The author of this wee book is particularly hard on "High diddle diddle," "Tom Thumb" and "Cock Robin," and states that "Mother Goose" was "written in bad English, and full of plumping wrong stories, from beginning to end." I am afraid this little book of nursery heresy was not very popular with the children. The copy from which our illustration was made is in too fine a condition ever to have been much read. Day also published "The A, B, C, with verses" and on the title-page printed this very alluring jingle:

At Day's book-store
You're sure to find
Some little book
Quite to your mind.

The verses in this book (8) are very much in the style of those of the rhymed alphabet of the New England Primer. One is:

The owls delight
In time of night.

and another:

The zebra wild
Is Afric's child.

Kiggins & Kellog, of William Street, New York, also published a quantity of little books about three inches by

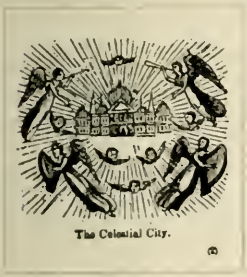

Figure 6

Figure 8

two, and of eight pages only. These little books also sold for a cent apiece and were very popular. One was entitled "Pretty Rhymes about Birds and Animals," and contains several well-known nursery verses, closing with two on "The Cock" as follows:

The cock doth crow,
To let you know,
If you be wise,
'Tis time to rise.

He that would thrive,
Must rise at five—
He that hath thriven
May lie till seven.

So while you are making your fortune you must "rise at five," but when you become rich you may be very indolent and "lie till seven." "The History of Domestic Animals," which describes the usefulness of the horse, the ox and other animals, indulges in the following lament that the hog cannot be put to work:

The hog is almost the only tame animal that is not of some use to us while living. The ox draws the plow and the cart; the horse carries us to ride; the cow gives us milk; hens lay us eggs; the sheep yields us wool, from which our warm winter clothing is made—but the hog does nothing but eat and sleep. But the pork and lard we get from his carcass when dead repay us for our care of him while living.

Sidney Babcock, of New Haven, Conn., was a prolific publisher of books for children, He issued several series of wee penny books even smaller than the New York ones described; also some a bit larger at two cents each; another set at three cents each, and his really big books, only four by six inches in size, however, at six cents

Figure 3

Figure 4

each. But his little penny books are the ones that particularly interest us just now. These had not only small-sized pages, but only eight of them with bright-colored paper covers and attractive pictures on the outside. The stories in these books were very practical and were intended to teach industry and virtue; but alas, even by their own records there were some children who did not behave! In "A Good Book for a Good Girl," two pages (9) of which are reproduced here, it says:

Children should be kind to each other. Some children quarrel, oh, that is very wicked. And some children go to Sunday-school merely to get a reward; but you, I hope, go to learn about the Saviour and the way to heaven.

In a series of wee books written by Lyman Cobb, an author of numerous school books well-known seventy or eighty years ago, there are some amusing descriptions.

These little old books of by-gone times, a few of which we have been looking over together, are now very scarce and the few copies that have come down to us are jealously cherished by the loving collector or are carefully preserved in historical libraries. Many of those now in existence are from old book-sellers remainders and so are in fair condition. Most of those that were actually sold and used by the children were soon read to pieces and then thrown into the fire. Of the few that have survived the hard usage of their little owners of long ago, many are in a very sorry and dilapidated condition, but even

FEEDING CHICKENS.

Ah, here is a little girl feeding chickens. She is a nice, little girl. The chickens belong to her. She is fattening them for market. When she sells them she will have a new gown.

THE LITTLE SCHOOL.

Here is a little school There are but three schol ars. They are all girls. Their names are Mary, Ann, and Jane. Grace, is the name of their little teacher.

But this is not the only school they go to. Neither

Figure 9

the rags are interesting, as they throw much light on interesting phases of life that our historians have considered beneath their notice.

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